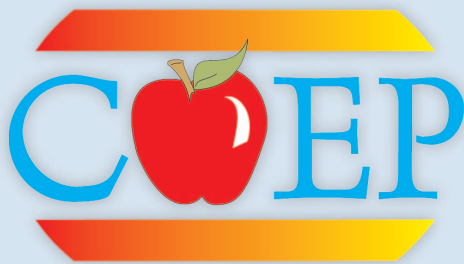


Community Outreach and Education Program

For over a decade, the NIEHS has been at the forefront of promoting increased interactions between environmental health scientists and the public. In 1996, the NIEHS established the Community Outreach and Education Program (COEP) as an essential characteristic of its Core Center Program to translate cutting-edge environmental health science research into knowledge that can be applied to public health.



COEPs around the nation serve as a bridge between investigators at core centers and the public. In addition, COEPs provide a key link between the NIEHS and an array of constituencies. COEPs host Town Meetings and other community forums, develop brochures, create environmental health curricula for inclusion in kindergarten through twelfth-grade classes, offer professional development to health care professionals, and facilitate interactions between communities and research centers. In this way, they

foster community–university partnerships, increase the public's understanding of environmental health science research, and promote greater awareness of community and public health needs.

Curricular materials developed by COEPs are used throughout the nation to teach students about environmental health and to nurture an interest in environmental health science research. One particular teacher training program, a five-year collaborative effort of eight COEPs, will provide more than 2,000 educators and 40,000 students with access to innovative, inquiry-based environmental health science materials by the end of 2003. Town Meetings and other community forums offer a productive environment for interactions among researchers, NIEHS leaders, public health and health care professionals, and community members. Such events have led to the development of new research programs at the NIEHS that target community needs, such as the novel NIEHS-supported Health Disparities Research program. Town Meetings have also resulted in policy change at local and state levels. For example, after the 2002 Iowa City Town Meeting, new standards on concentrated animal feeding operations became state policy. COEP-developed courses provide nurses, clinicians, and other public health professionals with much-needed environmental health information and hands-on research to help them serve their patients better.

In 2000, the NIEHS contracted with Analytical Sciences, Inc. (now Constella Health Sciences, a business unit of Constella Group, Inc.) to develop a COEP Resource Center. The purpose of the resource center is to facilitate interactions among the COEPs and to provide the general public with greater access to reliable environmental health information. The COEP Resource Center comprises a physical library located in Durham, North Carolina, and a web-based virtual library. The cornerstone of the resource center is a searchable database of all outreach and education materials developed and used by COEPs. Through the resource center, the public can view brochures, download fact sheets, access a variety of classroom activities and curricular materials, and request documents directly from COEPs. The resource center recently developed an exhibit booth to help COEPs reach a larger audience by promoting their materials at national professional conferences.



(Left to right) Liam O'Fallon, Allen Dearry, and Karalyn Colopy at the COEP Resource Center.

For more information | <http://www-apps.niehs.nih.gov/coeprc/>